

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-07

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, PINT, BG
SUBJ: ZIA'S VIEWS ON NATIONAL ELECTIONS

1. CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR, MAJOR GENERAL ZIAUR RAHMAN, CLEARLY SIGNALLED DURING OUR SUNDAY (MARCH 20) DINNER THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO MOVE GRADUALLY BUT DEFINITELY TOWARD THE HOLDING OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS. QUESTIONED WHETHER HE WAS REFERRING TO MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS (ALREADY SCHEDULED FOR MAY) OR OTHER LOCAL ELECTIONS, ZIA REITERATED IN WHAT HE CALLED STRICTEST CONFIDENCE THAT HE WAS SPEAKING OF ELECTIONS ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL.

2. ZIA SAID POLITICIANS WERE STARTING TO AGITATE AND THERE HAD BEEN SOME PRESS DEMAND FOR POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNING PROCESS. ALSO, THE PRESENT MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION HAS OUTLIVED ITS USEFULNESS. IT WAS NEEDED IN THE UNSETTLED SITUATION AFTER THE THREE COUPS OF 1975, BUT THE INTERNAL SECURITY SITUATION IS GENERALLY QUIET NOW AND THE PROCESS OF ADMINISTERING THE COUNTRY CAN BE HANDLED IN A MORE NORMAL MANNER.

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3. ZIA DECLINED TO INDICATE EXACTLY HOW THESE NATIONAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD AND MY GUESS WOULD BE THAT HE HAS NOT YET DECIDED. HE DID, HOWEVER, SAY THAT THE PREVIOUS SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT HAD NOT WORKED WELL AND THAT THE POLICIES OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE WERE ILL-ADVISED. "I KNOW THE PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH," HE SAID. "THE AWAMI LEAGUE WENT TOO FAR TO THE LEFT AND PROVOKED A

COUNTER REACTION". HE SAID THE PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH TEND TO BE TRADITIONAL AND CONSERVATIVE. ADEQUATE SCOPE MUST BE PROVIDED FOR PRIVATE INITIATIVE. SOCIALIZATION OF LARGE SEGMENTS OF THE ECONOMY NOT ONLY DIDN'T WORK IN ECONOMIC TERMS BUT ALSO ALIENATED IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN SOCIETY.

4. CITING RUMORS IN THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, I ASKED ZIA IF ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES WERE LIKELY BEFORE THE COMMONWEALTH MEETING IN LONDON IN JUNE. HE AVOIDED A DIRECT ANSWER BUT SAID SUCH RUMORS ARE STARTED BY UNDEREMPLOYED EAST EUROPEAN DIPLOMATS WHO EMPLOY LEFT WING SOURCES WHO NO LONGER KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON. (COMMENT: HE'S RIGHT. THE EAST EUROPEAN DIPLOMATS SPREAD MORE WILD RUMORS PER CAPITA THAN ANY OTHER GROUP IN TOWN.)

5. DEPUTY CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR MAHMOOD IS THINKING ALONG SIMILAR LINES. AT TEA FRIDAY AFTERNOON (MARCH 18) VICE MARSHAL MAHMOOD SAID AGITATION BY INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICAL GROUPS IS ON THE INCREASE. THE PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH ARE HIGHLY POLITICIZED, HE SAID, AND SOMETHING WILL HAVE TO BE DONE. PAKISTAN AND INDIA HAVE HAD NATIONAL ELECTIONS AND THESE HAVE NOW BEEN PROMISED IN SRI LANKA. BANGLADESH, HE IMPLIED, IS STARTING TO FEEL ISOLATED WITH ITS NON-ELECTED GOVERNMENT.

6. QUESTIONED FURTHER, MAHMOOD SAID HE DID NOT KNOW GENERAL ZIA'S THINKING ON THIS MATTER BUT FELT THAT HE AND THE OTHER DCMLA, ADMIRAL KHAN, SHOULD MEET WITH
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ZIA SOON AFTER KHAN'S RETURN FROM THE WATER RESOURCES CONFERENCE IN BUENOS AIRES TO CONSIDER THE BEST COURSE TO FOLLOW. KHAN RETURNS MARCH 26.
MASTERS

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